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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1432
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1510
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 6600
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUCPDOG/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC
RUEKJCS/DIA WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JEDDAH 000446

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/01/2031
TAGS: [ECON](#) [ELAB](#) [KWMN](#) [PINR](#) [SA](#)
SUBJECT: A GRAND VISION FOR JCCI WOMEN'S CENTER

Classified By: Consul General Tatiana Gfoeller for reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. During a meeting with Mrs. Oberwetter and Consulate General officers, the new director of the JCCI's women's center outlined her plan to expand the center's services and role in the development of Saudi women. Moving training and placement to other facilities, the women's center will now focus on increasing the women's involvement in the economy using technology, lobbying the government for equal treatment, developing young Saudi women, and strengthening the current female business community. End Summary.

THE CENTER'S EXPANDING ROLE

¶2. (U) On June 20 Mrs. Oberwetter, Pol/EconOffs, and PAOff met with Dr. Basmah Mosleh ((OMAIR)), the newly appointed general manager of the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry's (JCCI) Khadeejah Bint Khuwailed Women's Center. The Khadeejah Center was established in 2004 but Omair has been in her position for about one month. The center serves women in the Jeddah business community and is trying to expand its services with more outreach activities. Omair sees her role as the new director to prepare Jeddawi women for the new wave of activity coming to Saudi Arabia and attributes the new opportunities for women in the Kingdom to King Abdullah, whom she referred to as "the humanity king".

¶3. (U) Omair is trying to move the Khadeejah Center beyond simply finding a job for Saudi women to helping them develop and learn skills to fully participate in the changing Saudi society. She would like to educate women and private companies about e-learning and teleworking so that women will be able to work from home in areas such as accounting and graphic design. Currently, she is consulting with King Abdul Aziz University on the subject. In addition she would like to train women in e-commerce so they can market and trade online to increase their international exposure.

Other Initiatives:

- A flea market for women to sell goods on land donated by the Jeddah municipality
- Career Days at area universities
- Conference in February with leading women in various fields from the Middle East and West
- Arab News listing and DVD of top 20 businesswomen in Saudi Arabia to complement February 2007 conference

14. (U) Omair also wants to focus on lobbying various Ministries on the issues confronting Saudi women in the workplace. While some government ministries have women's departments, they generally are inadequately staffed and funded. Likewise, they are not fully functional and still often have to operate through departments run by men, which constrains the development of initiatives led by Saudi women. Job training has also moved from the Khadeejah Center to another JCCI training center that provides job skills training and interest testing.

15. (U) Omair said that while there are efforts to employ young Saudis, the private sector is not satisfied with the quality level of the labor force. At a recent career fair 5000 young women were present to apply for jobs in the private sector; however very few were actually hired because they lacked even basic work skills such as customer service. Not only is the quality of the Saudi employee an issue, and the obvious infrastructure problems, business owners do not know how they will train and manage female employees with all male management.

SERVING THE SAUDI WOMAN AT ALL STAGES

16. (U) Omair has a number of programs for students to gain more exposure to the work world. She is starting a college internship program at the Khadeejah Center in the coming months. She hopes to begin compiling research by doctoral candidates on women and employment that will be available in the JCCI library. She is also working on a project in which college graduates make websites for private companies; recent examples include the Savola Group and Panda grocery. The JCCI also houses a small business incubator in which Saudis

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can rent office space and have access to phones, fax, computers, etc. for 600 SAR a month to help new entrepreneurs get started. Six out of 20 current participants are female.

17. (U) For the more experienced businesswoman who does not need assistance setting up her business, Omair hopes to offer advanced training. She wants to offer courses to teach women about strategic planning for business expansion, how to work with the media, and protocol for handling official visits. In addition, she wants to offer workshops on merging, franchising, and international legal issues in business. To make sure that the ladies continue their enrichment even when not at the center, Omair publicizes international forums for the ladies to attend while they are traveling abroad on summer vacations.

FEMALE BOARD MEMBER INVOLVED AS WELL

18. (U) During the meeting, Olfat Qabbani, one the four JCCI female board members and a Jeddawi business owner, also greeted the Consulate group. Qabbani described her own efforts to create a Businesswomen's Club apart from the JCCI. She hopes this club will be up and running by this September. The club will have monthly meetings to discuss their experiences, concerns, and issues facing them as women business owners in Saudi Arabia. While one will not have to be a member of the JCCI to participate, she expects the membership will rise to 2000.

19. (C) Comment: Omair's plan for the Khadeejah Center, while seeming overly ambitious may come to fruition given the large monetary resources the center can draw from. The Khadeejah Center does receive a portion of the Chamber's budget (last year 71 million SAR) for its programs, but Omair is also expected to find sponsors for her operations and generate income for the center to operate. Omair's strategy of trying to serve a wider spectrum of Saudi women is a positive move for including more women in the economy. Expanding the mandate beyond finding a job to supporting and developing women in various aspects of economic activity might help Saudi women in the long run as they become more involved in

the economy. End Comment.

¶10. (U) Bio Note: Omair is a rising star in the Jeddah commercial scene. Prior to taking her post with the JCCI, she worked for the Savola Group during 2004-2006. She said that although she did not receive much guidance when she first took over the Khadeejah Center, she believes in setting high goals and considers successful women, such as Oprah Winfrey, as her role models. She appears to be well versed in modern business theories and comes across as very American in her manner and fluent English skills, which she learned while living in the United States for 23 years when her father worked for the Embassy of Saudi Arabia in Washington. Omair mentioned that she is friends with the family of Prince Bandar bin Sultan, who was the Saudi Ambassador to the US during that timeframe. Omair graduated from Langley High School in northern Virginia in 1988 at age 16. She then earned several degrees from American University in Washington, DC, including a bachelor of the arts in business administration and marketing (1993), a master's degree in special education, and a Ph.D. in technology education with a focus on using technology for learning disabled children (2003).

¶11. (U) Omair has an 11 year-old daughter and two sons, ages 7 and 2. Omair mentioned that her husband is currently working in Riyadh but she and the children remain in Jeddah because she thinks that Riyadh is too oppressive. She also said that, although she likes Los Angeles, she prefers the eastern United States, adding that her brother once worked as IBM's manager for the East Coast.
Gfoeller